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ART AND PROGRESS

AN ILLUSTRATED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Published by the American Federation of Arts
1741 New York Ave., Washington, D. C.

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SUBSCRIPTION PRICE \$2.00 A YEAR

VOL. V FEBRUARY 1914 No. 4

WHAT ARE ART MUSEUMS FOR?

In a recent issue of *The Newarker*, Mr. John Cotton Dana, the librarian of the Free Public Library of Newark and also Secretary of the Newark Museum Association, after bringing many impeachments against the Art Museum of today, asks the rather startling question, "Do we need museums at all?" The question, he says, answers itself, but according to his interpretation the answer is far from convincing.

The difficulty seems to us to lie in a lack of understanding or perhaps a misconception of what art museums are really for.

Obviously, as Mr. Dana says, art museums should not be merely reposi-

tories of treasure—they must be educational and the property of the people. But how are they to fulfil the latter functions?

Mr. Dana believes that they must be central, that is, in the business center of the city; that they must be planned in accordance with modern thought and present need; that whereas "for the special student they may have unlimited resources, to the casual visiting public they will tell, by a few appealing examples only, how daily life in this and that period and place have been ameliorated and advanced, and that those articles will be selected for more prominent display which are most closely related to the daily life of those who see them." He would subordinate paintings, and, though he does not say so, presumably, sculpture, and promote to prominence objects of applied art. "Painting in oil upon canvas," he says, "is not a craft that makes a strong appeal to the average man, save through the stories it tells. Its value after all is almost entirely pictorial." If these then are put in the subordinate place in which he thinks they belong, the average art museum, he says, will have much more room for the display of objects which have quite a direct bearing upon the daily life of those who support and use it—objects ranging from "shoes to sign posts and from table knives to hat pins."

Mr. Dana is right in placing high value on works of industrial art and urging that they be given place in museums. We sorely need museums of industrial art. But is he right in his valuation of paintings? Does he not rank art merely as craft, and if his suggestions were carried out would not standards be lowered rather than elevated?

To paint a great picture or to produce a great piece of sculpture one must be something more than a master craftsman. Technical perfection alone never produced a work of art. Great art is the intervention of man between man and nature, an interpretation made possible by deep insight and broad sympathy bestowed as gifts upon the talented few. It is this which thrills and moves the

observer. It is this which inspires, uplifts, refreshes. It is this manifestation of rare genius which gives works of the fine arts untold value.

It is right to make the conditions of labor as good as possible, to plan and upbuild our cities in accordance with the highest principles of art; but it would not be right to obliterate the country, or dry up the sea, or shut off the sky, or wither up the flowers, if we could, because they have no definite place as utilities of life. It is from these sources that man obtains his inspiration, his visions, his ideals.

The fine arts are to the applied arts as, in a measure, the country is to the town—works of nature to works of man—they give uplift and afford opportunities for recreation. We can not overprize them. The idealism which they inspire must, furthermore, find expression in the applied arts. We shall not have good sign posts, and table knives, and hat pins, until we have a much wider spread appreciation of the arts which are rightly called fine.

It is for this reason, to bring to the people this knowledge and delight which would otherwise be inaccessible, that art museums exist and are coming more and more in demand—not merely as show places but as educational centers reaching out to the people, offering freely to all that which no money can buy—an opportunity of seeing the best.

What we as a nation need most today are visions which can only be obtained through a knowledge of the finer things of life—music, poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture. This knowledge can be secured by the masses only through the instrumentality of public institutions such as schools, libraries and art museums. Obviously, then, there is a need and a great need for all of these, and not least of all the last.

THE TARIFF ON ART

There has been some confusion with regard to the interpretation of those sections of the tariff bill which refer to

art, owing to what seemed to be a contradiction between paragraphs 376 and 652. In response to a request for instructions from the Collector of Customs in New York, the Treasury Department at Washington has issued a letter which would seem to put an end to all misunderstandings.

This letter has not only been forwarded to the Collector of Customs in New York, but a copy has been sent to the American Federation of Arts to whom artists have applied for information. It is published herewith in full.

One point only would seem to require further explanation, and that is in the statement that the free entry of paintings, pastels, drawings and sketches is limited to one article which must be the original. This refers to one of a kind and would merely prohibit the free entry of replicas. It does not at all refer to the importation of collections of paintings, each one of which is an original.

The letter from the Treasury Department is dated December 16th and is as follows:

THE COLLECTOR OF CUSTOMS,
New York, N. Y.

SIR:

The Department is in receipt of your letter of the 12th ultimo, in regard to the interpretation of the provisions of paragraphs 376 and 652, respectively, of the tariff act of October 3, 1913.

Paragraph 376 reads as follows:

"Works of art, including paintings in oil or water-colors, pastels, pen and ink drawings, or copies, replicas or reproductions of any of the same, statuary, sculptures, or copies, replicas or reproductions thereof, and etchings and engravings, not specially provided for in this section, 15 per centum ad valorem."

Paragraph 652 provides for the free entry of

"Original paintings in oil, mineral, water, or other colors, pastels, original drawings and sketches in pen and ink or pencil and water-colors, artists' proof etchings unbound, and engravings and woodcuts unbound, original sculptures or statuary, including not more than two